

It's the season of worry for makers of Ganesh idols in Bengaluru



Artist Srinivas providing the final touches to a clay Ganesh idol in Bengaluru. | Photo Credit: [SAMPATH KUMAR G.P.](#)

They say owing to lack of good quality clay and drop in demand, the business is slow so far this year

Every year, come Ganesh Chaturthi, roads and streets across the city are filled with idols of Ganesh.

However, this year, even though the festival is less than a fortnight away, the roads and markets are not as densely packed with idols. Sellers cite a lack of good quality clay, and a drop in demand when compared to previous years as the reason.

“By this time every year, 35-45% of the business would have been done along with hundreds of orders being placed. However, this year the business is slow. We have not sold even 15% of our idols,” said M. Sridhar, an idol maker on R.V. Road.

The idol maker had to source clay from other districts this year, owing to the floods that ravaged several parts of Karnataka. “I had ordered many idols from Konnur in Belagavi district. However, my supplier and manufacturer lost everything in the floods,” he said.



A file photo of students of Government High School, Magadi Road, Police Colony, creating ecofriendly clay Ganesha idols. | Photo Credit: [V. Sreenivasa Murthy](#)

In the city’s Pottery Town, hundreds of families, who have honed the craft of making idols to perfection over generations, are finding it difficult to source clay.

S. Nanjundappa of Kumbara Karakushala Kaigarika Sangha in New Pottery Town said that the lack of good quality of clay was a major problem.

“With more people turning away from PoP, the demand for clay is high and supply is less. This is making it increasingly difficult for us ahead of the festival,” Mr. Nanjundappa said.

He also believes that more people have entered the idol-making business over the years. “This has had an adverse affect on the demand and supply of clay. The quality of clay has dipped, resulting in poorer quality of idols,” he said.

Cost of clay

While idol makers acknowledge that plaster of Paris is detrimental to the environment, they feel that the government should help them source ecofriendly raw material from sustainable sources. Simply raiding shops and seizing PoP idols is not the solution, they said.

“Officials from the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike and other agencies should ideally have provided ways and means to get more clay. It is not only their responsibility and duty to provide us with clay, it is also our right,” said Shivshankar N., who has been making idols for more than four decades.

He and other sellers felt that rules were introduced without foresight. “The ban on PoP has increased the rate of clay. We sometimes pay 5,000 for a load of clay, which we used to get for less than 1,500 a few years ago,” he added.



A file photo of an artist painting a Ganesh idol. | Photo Credit: [V. Sreenivasa Murthy](#)

Sellers' plea

Sellers and manufacturers of clay idols have repeatedly urged the government to allow them to use silt from lakes and other waterbodies. More often than not, silt is removed from lakes and simply dumped somewhere. "If they remove silt, we can all easily get a decent quality of silt mixed with clay. However, everything is being wasted," said a claymaker on Pottery Road. M. Srinivas, who runs a pottery shop on Kumara Street in K.R. Puram, said he sources clay from Kolar, and parts of Andhra Pradesh.

“We are not allowed to take the silt mixed with clay from the lakes in the city. As a result, we land up spending more on transportation than the actual raw material, even though the cost of quality clay has gone up,” he said.

When contacted, BBMP officials say that the civic body was ready to give the silt mixed with clay to those who ask for it. “If anyone comes to us asking for clay, we will definitely give them permission. However, we have not received any requests from anyone and no one has approached us,” a BBMP official said.

PoP idols still popular

Though the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) has instructed officials of government departments concerned and local governing bodies to implement the ban on plaster of Paris (PoP) idols, officials admit that it will be difficult to achieve a total ban.



Officials raid Ganesh idol shops on R.V. Road, in Bengaluru. | Photo Credit: [V. Sreenivasa Murthy](#)

Ganesh idols made from PoP and painted with harmful chemicals are still popular with many devotees who have placed orders for them, said idol makers.

“We still have a demand for PoP idols. People prefer them as they are more durable, cheaper than clay ones, and can be transported easily. PoP idols from last year are being worked on and sold,” said a seller near Minerva Circle in the city.

For instance, the demand for PoP idols is still rampant as most Ganesh mandals prefer them.

“Clay idols are fragile and many times they get damaged while transportation,” said a buyer from a mandal.

Officials hope to crack down on this. “Last year we had achieved around 65% ban on the PoP idols and this time we are aiming to achieve more than 80%. Issuance of licences to PoP idol manufacturers was stopped a while back. The authorities have been instructed to cancel the licence of the existing manufacturers making PoP idols and take the necessary action,” a KSPCB official said.

The KSPCB met with the police, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewage Board (BWSSB), Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (BESCOM) and sought their cooperation in implementing the ban.



A file photo of children and parents making clay Ganesh idols. | Photo Credit: [V. Sreenivasa Murthy](#)

Government agencies seized more than 20,000 PoP idols from manufacturing units in Kumbalgotu, on the outskirts of the city, last week. The BBMP also seized PoP idols from vendors on R.V. Road.

A BBMP official said that the big idols were confiscated in eight lorries. They will be kept in the BBMP’s custody and destroyed after the festival.

‘Change needed in mindset’

T.V. Ramachandra from the Centre for Ecological Studies, IISc., has said that there has to be a behavioral change in celebrating Ganesh Chaturti.

“Decades ago, people got clay from lake, made a Ganesh idol from it, and immersed the idol back in the lake. That was an ecofriendly cycle. Now, the idols are not immersed but are dumped, disrespecting both god and culture,” he added.

He also pointed out that colours used to paint the idols contain heavy metals like mercury and lead which not only affected lakes and aquatics but also contaminated groundwater.